

# Report on the Health Status of Older Adults

## La Paz County, Arizona

Established by the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), the Healthy Aging 2010 project focuses on issues related to health promotion and disease prevention in older adults. While the older adult population in Arizona is living longer, older adults are not necessarily living healthier lives. Chronic diseases often occurring in conjunction with emotional health problems are the most prevalent yet preventable health problem in the State. An analysis of available indicators of older adult health provides information for planning and community initiatives. The following information and data describe the current health status of adults 65 years of age and older living in La Paz County.

### *Population Characteristics*

Table 1 presents information about the characteristics of older adults living in La Paz County, as compared to Arizona and the United States. The 2001 population figures were estimated based on the 2000 U.S. Census. Approximately 26% of the total population in La Paz County is over the age of 65, compared to 13.0% for the state and 12.4% for the United States. For this county, the proportion of males is higher than females within the 65 and older age group.

**TABLE 1: POPULATION ESTIMATES\* FOR 2001**

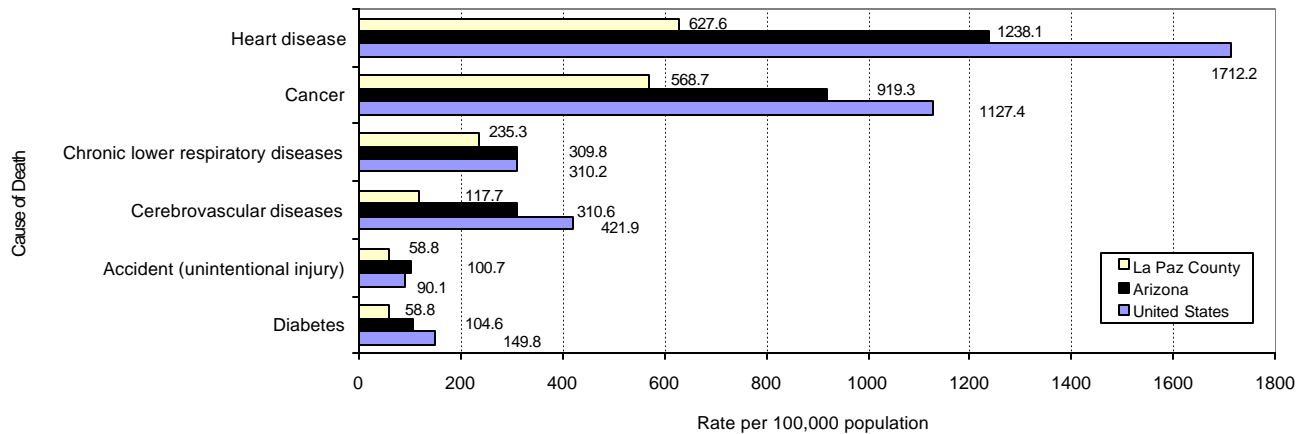
	La Paz County	Arizona	United States
Total Population	19,759	5,307,331	284,796,887
Age 65+ Population	5,099 (25.8%)	690,995 (13.0%)	35,411,395 (12.4%)
Gender, Age 65+			
Male	2,674 (52.4%)	306,535 (44.4%)	14,582,434 (41.2%)
Female	2,425 (47.6%)	384,460 (55.6%)	20,828,961 (58.8%)
Race/Ethnicity, Age 65+			
Caucasian, non-Hispanic	4,622 (90.6%)	599,209 (86.7%)	29,595,582 (83.6%)
Hispanic	206 (4.0%)	57,413 (8.3%)	1,754,381 (5.0%)
African American	19 (0.4%)	10,053 (1.5%)	2,856,805 (8.1%)
American Indian	201 (4.0%)	14,360 (2.1%)	140,099 (0.4%)
Asian	17 (0.3%)	6,454 (1.0%)	810,399 (2.3%)
Other	36 (0.7%)	3,506 (0.5%)	254,130 (0.7%)

\*Estimates calculated based on the 2000 U.S. Census

### *Mortality and Hospitalizations*

The six leading causes of death among adults age 65 and older in La Paz County for 2001 are shown in Figure 1. Since national death rates are not currently available for 2001, U.S. preliminary death data for the year 2000 are included in the figure for the purpose of a general comparison. For all categories, La Paz County reported a lower mortality rate than Arizona in 2001, with the largest difference in death rate due to heart disease, in which Arizona reported 98% higher death rate. Cancer also had 38% lower death rate in La Paz County compared to the state in 2001. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths both county and statewide; La Paz County again reported 31% lower death rate than the state. Within the accident/unintentional injury category, falls were responsible for the most deaths in both Arizona and La Paz County.

**FIGURE 1: SIX LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH AMONG ADULTS AGE 65 AND OLDER; MORTALITY RATE PER 100,000**



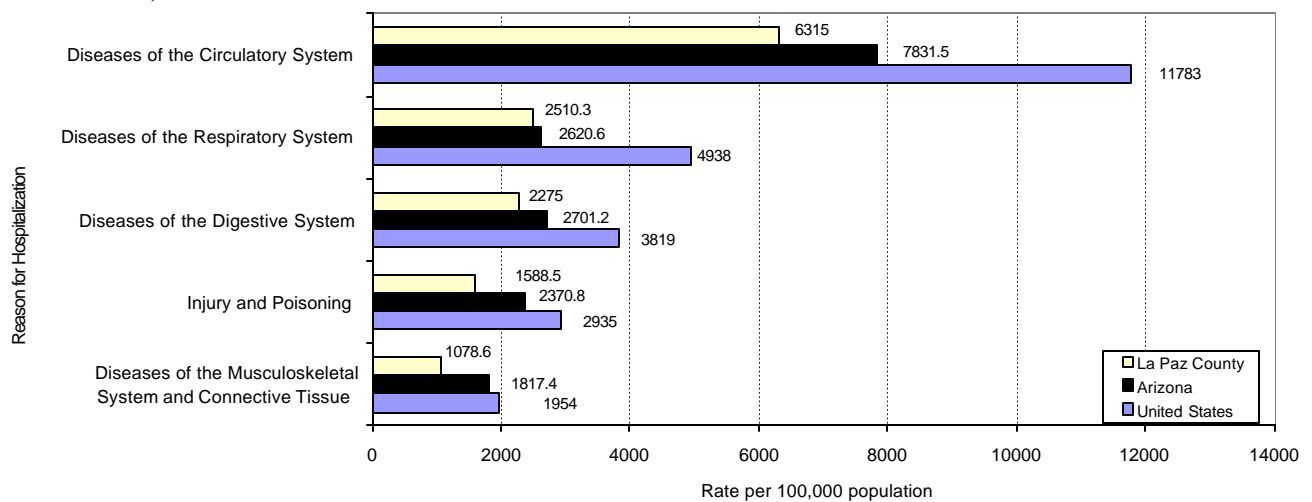
Source: Advance Vital Statistics Report. Arizona Department of Health Services: 2001.

Note: Corrections have been made to reassign reported deaths in Arizona counties originally listed as unknown.

National Vital Statistics Report, Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2000. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 10/2001.

Figure 2 depicts the five leading causes of hospitalizations among older adults in non-federal facilities in La Paz County, Arizona, and the United States, based on primary ICD9 diagnosis codes. While county and state data reflect hospitalizations during the year 2001, but because national hospital discharge data are not currently available for 2001, U.S. data for the year 2000 are included for the purpose of a general comparison. Federal facilities, such as Indian Health Services and Veterans Affairs hospitals, are not included within these data, and care must be given when considering hospitalizations within these populations. Also hospitalization data do not include treatment in emergency departments or outpatient facilities. Additionally, it is important to note that hospital discharge data describe the number of hospitalizations, rather than individuals; one individual may be represented multiple times within the data if that individual was hospitalized on multiple occasions within the same year.

**FIGURE 2: FIVE LEADING CAUSES OF HOSPITALIZATION AMONG ADULTS AGE 65 AND OLDER; HOSPITALIZATION RATE PER 100,000**



Source: 2001 Hospital Discharge Data. Arizona Department of Health Services.

Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics, 2000 National Hospital Discharge Survey. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 6/2002.

La Paz County reported lower hospitalization rate than Arizona for all categories, with the largest difference in hospitalizations due to diseases of the circulatory system, in which the county reported 24% lower hospitalization rate than the state in 2001. In considering diseases of the circulatory, respiratory, digestive, and musculoskeletal/connective tissue systems individually, the leading medical condition within each category resulting in hospitalization for older adults countywide was heart disease, bronchitis, gastrointestinal hemorrhage, and arthritis, respectively. Within the injury and poisoning category, hip fractures were the most frequently diagnosed medical condition, and falls were reported as the main cause of injury. The average length of stay in the hospital among older adults in La Paz County was 5.0 days, compared to 4.7 days for Arizona and 6.0 days nationally (year 2000 data). The average hospitalization charges for La Paz County seniors in 2001 was \$20,651, compared to \$21,289 for the state; national figures are not available. Cumulative data indicates that La Paz County seniors incurred total hospitalization costs equaling \$20,237,890 for the year 2001.

## ***Risk Factors***

In considering leading chronic health conditions and mortality, it is important to keep in mind the role that risk factors play in health. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS), established by the Centers for Disease Control, is a national telephone survey that polls individuals about specific high-risk behaviors, and is a useful tool in assessing the general health of the population.

Through the use of random dialing, the survey provides a representative cross-section of the national population. On a local level, however, the BRFSS is limited in its ability to represent the population, due to small sample sizes. Additionally, individuals not having a telephone within their household are excluded from participation, which in Arizona includes approximately 6% of the total population. **Thus, BRFSS data reported for the state is not representative of the state population over age 65, and caution must be used in interpreting data beyond the context of the surveyed population.** Despite their limitations, BRFSS data nonetheless provide general indicators about a community's health status. Table 2 describes demographic characteristics of the surveyed BRFSS population.

Due to very small sample sizes, county-level data was not reported for La Paz County. Statewide data is presented in this report to provide a general indication of the health status of older adults in Arizona.

**TABLE 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS ON THE BRFSS 2000, ADULTS 65+**

	Arizona	United States
Number of respondents, ages 65+	624	34,087
Gender		
Male	245 (39.3%)	11,913 (34.9%)
Female	379 (60.7%)	22,174 (65.1%)
Race/Ethnicity		
Caucasian, non-Hispanic	566 (90.7%)	28,915 (84.8%)
Hispanic	45 (7.2%)	1,977 (5.8%)
Black	5 (0.8%)	1,764 (5.2%)
American Indian	5 (0.8%)	332 (1.0%)
Other	3 (0.5%)	1,099 (3.2%)
Mean Age (Years)	73.8	74.0

Of the 624 older adults surveyed in Arizona, 41.3% described their general health status as very good or excellent, compared to 35.4% for the United States. Fifty-five surveyed adults (8.8%) in Arizona described their general health as poor, a lower rate than reported for the United States (9.6%).

Being overweight or obese, poor dietary habits, little or no physical activity, and tobacco use are all associated with an increase in health problems. As shown in Table 3, according to the 2000 BRFSS, 52.1% of the surveyed older adults in Arizona are classified as overweight or obese by national health standards, yet only 27.1% of respondents reported current attempts at losing weight. Over half of the respondents in Arizona (57.0%) reported that they did not consume the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, and 37.5% reported being physically inactive. The remaining 62.5% of respondents reported participating in a physical activity, although only 35.9% of respondents exercised at the recommended activity level of 20 minutes or more on 3 or more days per week. This is slightly less than the 37.3% rate reported nationally. The most popular activities among older adults, as reported on the statewide 2000 BRFSS, are walking, gardening, golf, aerobics, and bicycling. Also in 2000, 7.4% of surveyed adults in Arizona reported that they are current daily smokers, a slightly lower incidence than reported for the nation (7.9%). Nineteen of the 46 daily smokers (41.3%) reported attempts at quitting smoking, with at least 1 day of non-smoking within the past year. This is slightly higher than the national rate of 40.9%.

**TABLE 3: RISK FACTORS AMONG RESPONDENTS AGE 65 AND OLDER; BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SURVEY, 2000**

	Arizona	United States
Weight Group <sup>1</sup>		
Normal weight	46.8%	42.5%
Overweight	35.1%	36.7%
Obese	17.0%	16.8%
Unknown	1.1%	4.0%
Daily Servings of Fruits and Vegetables		
Less than once a day or never	1.4%	3.3%
1 to less than 3 times per day	16.8%	21.9%
3 to less than 5 times per day	38.8%	43.3%
5 or more times per day	42.9%	31.5%
Activity level/exercise <sup>2</sup>		
Physically inactive	37.5%	37.0%
Less than recommended activity	26.6%	25.7%
Meets recommended activity level	35.9%	37.3%
Smoking status		
Current smoker, smoke everyday	7.4%	7.9%
Current smoker, smoke some days	1.9%	2.1%
Former smoker	41.3%	37.4%
Never smoked	48.7%	52.1%
Don't know/refused question	0.6%	0.5%

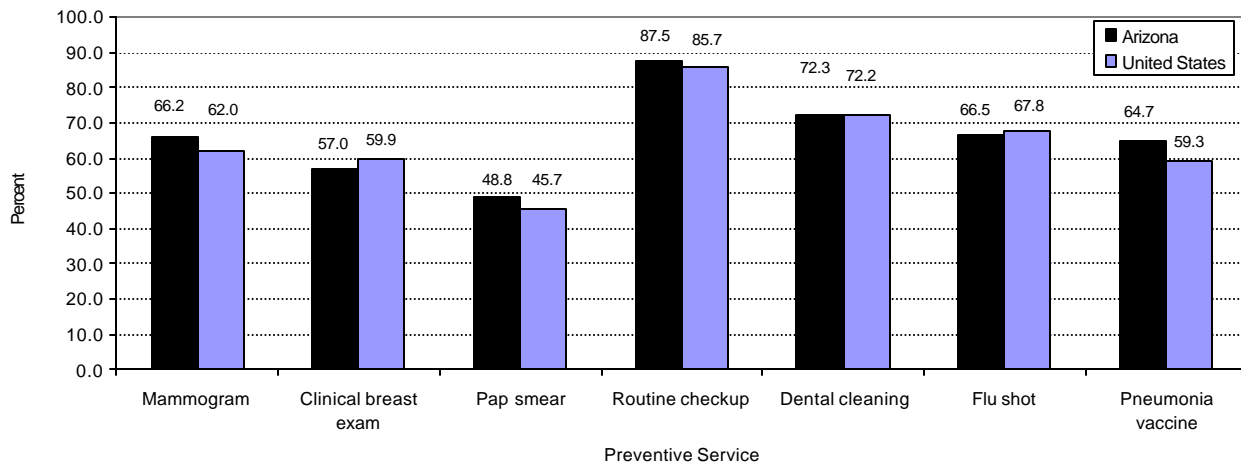
<sup>1</sup>Based on Body Mass Index, BMI<25.0 normal weight, BMI 25.0 and < 30.0 overweight, BMI 30.0 obese

<sup>2</sup>Recommended activity is exercise 3 or more days per week for 20 minutes or more

## ***Preventive Care***

The use of preventive care services provides an effective means for maintaining or improving individual health status, and is especially important for the aging population. Yearly screenings for older adults are recommended for a number of healthcare services. Figure 3 demonstrates the use of such services among those age 65 years and older adults within the past year, as reported on the BRFSS. The percentage for pneumococcal vaccine is reported for individuals receiving the vaccine at any point in their life.

**FIGURE 3: PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS 65+ BY RECOMMENDED PREVENTIVE SERVICES USE; BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SURVEY, 2000**



Among all survey respondents, “obtaining a yearly medical checkup” was the highest reported use of a preventive service, with a rate 87.5% for Arizona and 85.7% for the United States. Yearly dental cleaning was also highly reported among state and national respondents, a rate of approximately 72% for both regions. Arizona exceeded the national rate for obtaining a pneumooccal vaccine, with 64.7% of state respondents reporting ever having the vaccine, compared to 59.3% for the United States. A slightly lower rate was reported for Arizona respondents having a flu shot in the past year (66.5%), compared to 67.8% for the nation.

In the category of women’s health, 66.2% of female respondents in Arizona reported having a mammogram in the past year, compared to 62.0% nationally. Fewer females in Arizona reported having a breast exam performed by a health professional within the past year (57.0%), compared to 59.9% nationally. As breast cancer is the fifth leading cause of cancer mortalities in Arizona (year 2001 data), the use of preventive services related to breast health is especially important. Yearly Pap smears were obtained by fewer than 50% of all state and national female respondents.

### ***Mental Health and Support Services***

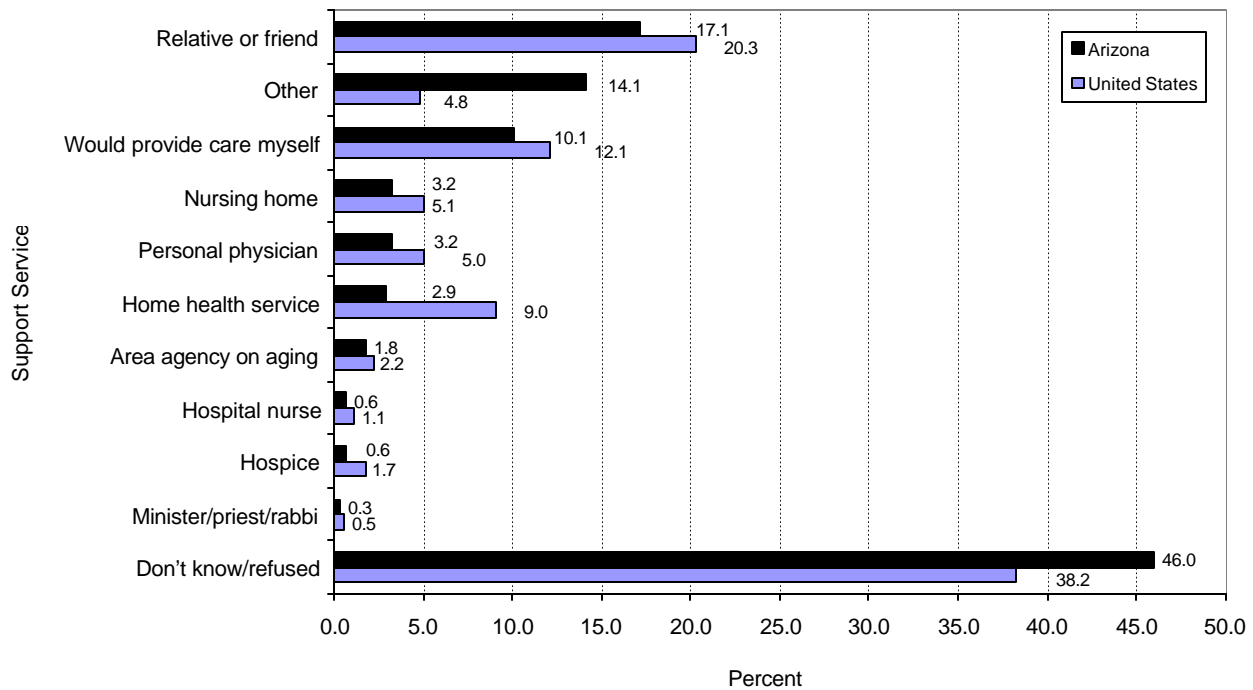
According to BRFSS 2000 data, older respondents in Arizona reported an average of 1.7 days during the past month when their mental health was “not good”, in comparison to 2.1 days reported nationally. When questioned about more specific indicators of mental health status, for example feeling depressed, anxious, or not well-rested, 23.7% of older respondents in Arizona reported having at least 14 days of poor emotional health within the past month, compared to 22.3% of national respondents. While BRFSS data are by no means a clinical diagnosis of mental condition, 14 or more days of poor emotional health may indicate a need to seek professional attention.

Despite the proportion of older BRFSS respondents reporting poor emotional health, ADHS data indicate that only 0.5% of the population aged 60 and older received mental health treatment in 2000 through Regional Behavioral Health Authorities (RBHAs). RBHAs are community-based organizations contracted by ADHS that provide a variety of mental health services, predominately to individuals suffering from serious mental illnesses. Although these data only describe use of public mental health programs excluding treatment provided by private agencies or personal

physicians, it is nonetheless clear that many older adults in Arizona are not utilizing available mental health support services.

Support services potentially serve an important function in the daily lives of older adults who are unable to care for themselves. However, as shown in Figure 4, based on the 2000 BRFSS, over 45% of Arizona respondents did not know who to call for assistance in the event that an elderly friend or relative required care. Although there are public services available to the aging community, less than 13% of the older respondents in Arizona thought of these services as a resource for needed care.

**FIGURE 4: PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS 65+ BY PLANNED USE OF SUPPORT SERVICES ; BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SURVEY, 2000**



BRFSS 2000: "Who would you call to arrange short or long-term care in the home for an elderly relative or friend who was no longer able to care for themselves?"

Survey participants were also questioned about their own need for assistance with personal care needs (e.g. eating, bathing) or routine needs (e.g. household chores, shopping). One hundred seventy-five individuals responded to these questions in Arizona. Of those, 161 people responded that they did not need help with personal care needs, 8 respondents indicated that they received the necessary care from immediate family members, 5 individuals utilized a paid employee or home health service, and 1 person reported not receiving needed help from anyone. Fifty-four individuals responded that they needed assistance with routine tasks; again the majority of respondents reported receiving help from immediate family members. Also respondents highlighted multiple public resources utilized for assistance, including paid employees or home health agencies and unpaid volunteers. Two of the 54 individuals (3.7%) needing assistance with routine tasks reported not receiving assistance from anyone. Nationally, use of a paid employee or home health agency was the most often cited public service utilized for both personal care and routine needs.

## *Healthy Aging 2010*

Working with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private community-based programs, the Healthy Aging 2010 plan will “connect the dots” to the many activities and programs currently available to meet the needs of older Arizonans. For communities already engaged in health-related projects, it is hoped that this report will provide updated information on older adult health in La Paz County. For communities not yet formally involved in such activities, hopefully this report will encourage interest and dialogue around initiating such projects. To learn more about the Healthy Aging 2010 plan, please contact Ramona Rusinak at (602) 542-1223 or visit the Healthy Aging 2010 website at <http://www.hs.state.az.us/phs/healthyaging2010/index.htm>.

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